



OPEN SPACE

Hoffman would only protect land if she can put paved trails and parking lots wherever she wants. No wonder landowners have come to distrust Kennett! I have a plan that preserves our natural beauty and expands our trail system through partnerships with landowners. *Click to read more.*

I have bolded some text for emphasis

Claim

I CLAIMED “Hoffman passed up at least a million dollars in matching funding for the \$3.2 million purchase of the 103 acre Spar Hill Farm, depleting our open space tax funds and forcing the Township to resort to significant debt financing – which Hoffman voted for – to complete the purchase”.¹

Counter

HOFFMAN COUNTERED Hoffman has yet to dispute these claims

Claim

- Context These are matching state and local funds that The Land Conservancy for Southern Chester County (TLC) has applied for and received for easements and acquisitions across the township. Hoffman and the other supervisors elected to complete the acquisition of Spar Hill without TLCs help and then just could not make up their minds in time to submit the grant application.

I CLAIMED “Properties like Spar Hill that the Township took out loans to purchase are being so poorly managed that the public is receiving little value. For example, 3 years after being acquired, Spar Hill still has derelict buildings, ‘no trespassing’ signs, and no formal public access, let alone a managed trail system”.¹

- Context: Hoffman and the other supervisors completed the purchase of Spar Hill without any plan – or even meaningful discussions - for how to protect, use, or manage the land or how to pay for any changes. Once the purchase was complete, other delays (including consideration of clearly unrealistic options) pushed any decisions back still further.

Counter

HOFFMAN COUNTERED “In the case of Spar Hill, there are many buildings on the property, and taking time to consider what should be preserved for future use versus what should be razed is an important decision that shouldn’t be made quickly or without a long term plan in place. While I know everyone wants instant gratification, taking time to consider options and budgeting for them isn’t dragging our feet- it’s making good, long term decisions.”⁵

Claim

I CLAIMED “As Kennett’s primary preservation partner, TLC saved the Township money and incurred zero debt with the properties it has protected”.¹

- Context: Through grants and fundraising, TLC has raised at least one dollar for every dollar Kennett has spent on identifying / protecting lands and maintaining preserves in the township.

HOFFMAN CLAIMED “In working with our partner TLC to secure the Spar Hill Farm, as then President, Peter helped negotiate the purchase of that property. Calling this purchase a “bad deal” is an odd position for a negotiator to take. And even odder still to deflect blame on someone else.”⁵

Counter

HOFFMAN COUNTERED Hoffman has yet to dispute these claims. But **after 6 years as a supervisor, Hoffman has demonstrated in meeting after meeting that she still does not understand how conservancies like TLC are funded** and the critical role they play in preserving open space in the region.

I COUNTER Hoffman has the basic facts all wrong about Kennett’s most significant acquisition to date! TLC worked for years, at no cost to the township, to bring Kennett and the owners of Spar Hill to the table. We were delighted to help begin the discussions, offer some support for the paperwork provided, and to do our best to help Kennett meet key deadlines. But the decisions questioned here were all taken by the Township after the purchase price was agreed upon, and against TLCs advice: to forgo to least \$1 million in grants, to close the deal using eminent domain, to delay for two years (and then abandon) an easement that would have offered greater protection for sensitive areas, and then still more delays as one unrealistic proposal after another was considered for the use of the land and the

Claim

HOFFMAN CLAIMED “Once you get beyond the aggressive tone of the mailers, what strikes me the most is their lack of substance. (Doehring) shares no positions other than he can do better than I can - because he said so.”⁵

Counter

buildings. That is how, 3 years after spending millions of dollars, the public still cannot enjoy Spar Hill.

I COUNTER After 5 years of investment in improving Kennett’s open space and trails, I have shared a very clear vision with Hoffman – she has just never listened!!

Here is a short list of ideas I have shared in countless emails and meetings.

- I have described the benefits – and the limitations – of the kinds of unique partnerships with organizations like TLC, and have proposed specific ways to improve these.
- I recognize that our efforts to protect open space create more than trail linkages – they knit together a 400+ acre cross-state “green corridor”.
- I have promoted specific projects and policy changes to balance the need for public access through multiuse trails like the Kennett Greenway. This includes new adaptations for people with disabilities now being incorporated into trail construction guidelines.
- I have explored how to weave education activities into the work of conservancies. I

Claim

Counter

HOFFMAN CLAIMED “When I am criticized for prioritizing public access open space over restricted access open space when tax dollars are spent for preservation ... it harkens for a return to **darker days of protected interests that we have learned are dangerous.**”²

have helped to author new national guidelines for including people with disabilities in the programs and work undertaken by conservancies, that I hope to bring into Kennett as a model.⁶

I COUNTER The “darker days of protected interests” suggests that decisions are made in secret. But every decision to spend township funds on open space is ultimately made by the Supervisors after being thoroughly vetted by the Township’s Land Conservation Advisory Committee (LCAC) (though the public only learns later which specific lands are being protected because the negotiations are by necessity confidential). Maybe Hoffman feels that this process is so mysterious because **after 6 years as supervisor, she participated in first LCAC meeting just this past month!**

Hoffman’s reference to “darker days” might well apply, however, to the township’s own actions

- Hoffman supported **the township’s decision to invoke eminent domain to close the acquisition of Spar Hill**
- The Township also apparently **failed to fully comply with state regulations for**

Claim

Counter

HOFFMAN CLAIMED “I support what I call “Public Money - Public Purpose”.”³

“I support... Public money equaling public access. All taxpayers should be able to enjoy lands purchased with public funds”

HOFFMAN CLAIMED “In supporting the incorporation of trail easements on properties that the Township preserves, the public reaps the benefits of the preservation and can “live” the fruits of their hard earned tax dollars with meaningful enjoyment.”³

public disclosure when lands were acquired

I COUNTER Hoffman’s commitment to public purpose rings hollow given the following facts (which most residents are unaware of):

- While 25% of open space dollars can be used to maintain or improve lands have been acquired, the township cannot do so because it apparently **failed to comply with state regulations when lands were acquired**. This question remains unresolved for more than one year
- Lisa Moore apparently stole a lot dollars set aside for Open Space, but almost two years late, we still do not know how much

I COUNTER It is true that public access is greater when the lands is purchased outright. There is usually no public access for lands that are eased (e.g., when the township pays a landowner to give up the right to develop the property), unless a trail easement has been negotiated. But Hoffman apparently does not understand that easements still offer a clear public purpose and public benefit, like the protection of open space from rampant development. **Hoffman does not seem to have read the Township’s own**

Claim

Counter

HOFFMAN CLAIMED “It is important to me - and I believe to you - that the land we preserve with your tax dollars, wherever possible, is accessible to you, the public and not just preserved for a pretty view or to provide a tax benefit to a landowner.”³

HOFFMAN CLAIMED “...sensitive habitats, watersheds, significant woodlands and wildlife - all things that benefit our quality of life are preserved.”³

?My position on open space has always been Public Funds - Public Purpose. If land is to be purchased with public, taxpayer dollars then the public should have meaningful access to it. Many times, this will be with trails. Some pieces of land may be wetlands or be environmentally sensitive,

Spring 2021 Newsletter, which estimated all of these benefits of open space as adding up to tens of millions of dollars for Kennett Township and its residents.⁴

I COUNTER There are many criteria considered when valuing land to be protected, but a “pretty view” is not one of them! And the limited tax benefit is rarely a major factor in a landowner’s decision to sell or ease their land. Landowners are much more likely to struggle with the price (set by an independent appraiser). Landowners often hesitate to sell a parcel next to their house because they might not trust how the land – and public access to it - will be managed, and the resulting impact on their own home’s value.

I COUNTER Hoffman has consistently supported proposals for expanding parking lots and paving trails, even in areas already designated as environmentally unique or sensitive (and which public funds have already been used to protect), and even when other analyses suggest that there are better options for providing public access. No wonder landowners hesitate to trust the Township and instead prefer the land to be held by an independent entity like TLC.

Claim

in which case, we have to weigh trail access with maintaining those sensitive habitats.”⁵

HOFFMAN CLAIMED “I support... Partnerships with The Land Conservancy (TLC) (sic) and other preservation organizations”.⁷

“My opponent thinks our manager is “tough” and complains about his “style”.... .”³

Counter

Does Hoffman understand what it means to protect sensitive areas? Consider the following.

- **Hoffman imposed the bare minimum level of protection for Spar Hill;** e.g., one that provides no carve outs for especially sensitive areas, and no independent oversight to ensure that standard are being met.
- The Chandler Mill Trail was delayed for 3 years (and almost leading to the loss of \$2 million of state funding) because of efforts to drive **a paved trail through private, protected land in sensitive habitats,** efforts which Hoffman fully supported.

I COUNTER Hoffman does not seek “partnership” but complete control. After first respecting a long-standing agreement to make funds to TLC to support maintenance of its preserves, the Township Manager, Eden Ratcliff, began in April to make one excuse after another for withholding \$70,000 promised to TLC for 2020. These funds were essential to maintaining preserves in the Township being over-run during the pandemic. **By September, it became clear that Ratcliff – with Hoffman’s support - was simply withholding funds in an attempt to bully TLC into making**

Claim

Counter

HOFFMAN CLAIMED “the landowner has the option to work with a conservancy group or seek other funding sources to preserve the land. We applaud those efforts and are happy to cooperate in any way that we are able that aligns with our Public Money - Public Purpose philosophy.”³

HOFFMAN CLAIMED “If you ever questioned the need for open space, you may have had your mind changed this past year. With more people at home enjoying their pets and families, usage on Kennett Township’s trails and parks increased dramatically. Thanks to the foresight of great groups as TLC (The Land Conservancy of Chester County) with help from Kennett Township, our trail system was able to provide relief from the stresses of this past year and the ability to reconnect with the outdoors.”³

concessions that were simply impossible for an independent land conservancy. In February 2021, Hoffman finally voted to pay the funds committed in the 2020 budget, as a donation that Ratcliff had just 6 months earlier claimed was illegal. Funds included in the 2021 budget are still, however, being withheld, with one excuse after another.

I COUNTER After 6 years in power, Hoffman still misunderstands how Open Space is funded! Unless a landowner donates the land outright to TLC, some degree of township funding has almost always been required.

I COUNTER When its residents needed trails and open space the most, Kennett Township failed to deliver. The 80 acre Stateline Woods Preserve was so badly over-run that it had to be closed for the first time in a decade to try to recover. Meanwhile the 160 acres in the Township’s Spar Hill and the Lord Howe properties sat empty a half-mile down the road because of the mis-steps of Hoffman and others. At the same time, Hoffman withheld over \$70,000 in promised funding to TLC for almost 10 months during the pandemic, making one excuse after

Claim

Counter

HOFFMAN CLAIMED “Kennett Township is working towards the overall goal of preserving 30% of open space- a goal set by Chester County in its Landscapes 3 plan. We’re getting close- having achieved 23% preservation already. We have worked with our conservancy partners to achieve these goals including TLC (The Land Conservancy for Southern Chester County) where Peter was past President.”⁵

“Controlling growth and preserving what makes Kennett Township special requires having a long term vision”.³

HOFFMAN CLAIMED “In the case of Spar Hill, there are many buildings on the property, and taking time to consider what should be preserved for future use versus what should be razed is an important decision that shouldn’t be made quickly or without a long term plan in place.”⁵

another. And Hoffman continues to make excuses for withholding payment included in the 2021 budget, with public use of preserves remaining at their highest levels ever.

I COUNTER For 6 years, the only “vision” for open space cited by Hoffman has been the goal of protecting 30%, a goal set by others years ago. Hoffman’s new “vision” – Public Money Public Purpose - is contradicted both by the facts surrounding open space, and her own record of decisions and mis-steps, as described above.

I COUNTER I have spoken to residents who participated in the many meetings held to discuss options at Spar Hill, who have expressed frustration at the lack of progress and follow-up.

Claim

HOFFMAN CLAIMED “I support... Public money equaling public access. All taxpayers should be able to enjoy lands purchased with public funds.”⁷

“I support... meeting or exceeding Chester County's 30% land preservation goal.”⁷

Counter

I COUNTER After 6 years as a Supervisor, responsible for approving millions of dollars of open space funding, Hoffman still does not understand how we reach out goals for protecting land. We do not just protect land by acquiring properties – we protect land by easing them. An easement might not support trails, but it does protect land from development, and at much less cost than an outright acquisition. Some landowners have backed away from negotiations with Kennett that would have protected important lands from development – and in some case, offering crucial trail linkages - because they do not trust the Township! The only way we can meet a goal of 30% is consider easements AND acquisitions.

1. Doehring, [Open Space postcard mailer](#)
2. Hoffman Blog “[Entrenched Interests](#)”
3. Hoffman Blog “[Open Space Public Money Public Purpose](#)”
4. What’s the Economic Value of Our Open Space? by Jeff Yetter and Michael Guttman - Land Conservation Advisory Committee (LCAC), Kennett Township Spring 2021 Newsletter
5. Whitney Hoffman for Supervisor email to Township Residents of 4/27
6. Land Trust Alliance Advisory Council on Inclusive Health and Disabilities. (2021). *Open to All: A disability inclusion resource guide for land trusts*. Land Trust Alliance. May (Projected).
7. Hoffman Postcard, “Preserving the Heart of Kennett Township”, 5/8

Claim

Counter